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PRAYER

and developing a life of prayer

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What Is Prayer?

Prayer is, at its heart, the communication that is the fabric of the human being's (and human species') relationship with its Father. When a Jew, Muslim, or Christian prays to God, the very act itself assumes these to be true at the very least :

- that there's One beyond each and all of us, beyond all that is around us;
- that this One cares enough to bother with you;
- that this One cares enough to want your response;
- that this One cares enough to respond to you;
- that this One is effective enough for that response to make a difference.

"When I go aside in order to pray, I find my heart unwilling to approach God; and when I tarry in prayer my heart is unwilling to abide in Him. Therefore I am compelled first to pray to God to move my heart into Himself, and when I am in Him, I pray that my heart remain in Him."

John Bunyan

A Christian has an even more intimate picture than that. In most of the other faiths, the believer must get prepared to pray. Muslims, for example, have an elaborate ritual of washing themselves before their prayers, symbolic of repentance and thus cleanness/holiness before God. But Christians see it differently. God as Christ came to us as we are, to remake our relationship with the Divine. Knowing that even our best holiness is rags, but Jesus' holiness in us means everything, when we come in prayer we come **as we are**. Unwashed. Messy and icky inside. Sometimes scared. Sometimes needy. Sometimes empty. Sometimes bored. Sometimes furious. Or screaming for revenge. But we come. We come because God has **already called out to us**, through the Scriptures and by the good news of Jesus the Christ. We come trusting that through prayer God can change us, and can change the things that happen in life. We come trusting that God is with us and builds us up, that the Holy Spirit prays with us and for us. We trust that the Lord will lead us to lose our anger, lead us to repentance, lead us to being open to the Spirit's voice, lead us to love

of God and of each other.

How To Start Praying

That is, when Christians bother to pray at all. A rather large part of the Christian church rarely prays. They are not much different from the typical agnostic. Both [doubt](#) that prayer matters, or doubt that God loves them, or doubt that they are clean enough, or doubt that God is able to make good things happen in this world. If that's the way you think, I challenge you to *just do it*.

- **Don't worry about your doubts.**
- **Don't worry about how much time you spend at prayer.**
- **Don't worry about using the right words.**
- **Don't worry that you might think something really bad and God will get mad.**
- **Don't worry about whether you're 'ready' to pray.**
- **Don't worry about whether you have the right theology of prayer.**
- **Don't worry about thinking of something to say.**
- **Don't worry about how to pray.**

Just **pray**, offering whatever you're thinking and feeling to the Lord. Whatever you bring, it's a start. As you pray more regularly or more often, the usual experience is that a strange thing starts happening to you. You start being more truthful in prayer, you start turning away from what you did wrong, your attitude becomes more confident, you start taking the time to listen, you start looking for the signs of divine dialogue in your daily life, you start hungering to read the Scriptures, you start wanting to pray with others, you think less and less about yourself. You'll find things to do and ways to prepare that help you be more open to God in prayer -- you don't have to do them, but they can help. You begin to let the Holy Spirit change you. And this is the beating heart of a relationship with Someone you can't see or touch. Strange? But it's true. True love.

"One should offer not what one has, but what one is."

Paul Evdokimov, *[The Sacrament Of Love](#)*

Start Small

When you read books or hear speakers or take courses on prayer, it's very easy to get intimidated. Prayer can sound so deep, so all-encompassing, so blissful, so difficult that it seems to be out of reach. But God isn't asking you to pray like Francis of Assisi or Jeanne Guyon or St. Anthony, though you can learn from them. God is asking you to pray like *you*. The Lord doesn't really care if you've ever

prayed at morning's first light (though it is a great time for it). God doesn't care if you ever went on a prayer retreat, or walked a prayerwalk, or kept a [journal](#) -- good things all, but that's not the point. God is reaching out to your consciousness, your mind, your soul. God wants your love.

So when you begin, it's a good idea to start small. Or, to re-start small, if you're coming back to God or if you've been badly broken. Small means little I-love-yous and thank-yous and have-[mercy](#)-on-mes. They're short, like post-its or glances. But if they're heartfelt, God takes them for what they are: real communication. It's small, but sometimes that's all we can manage to do. As confidence or love grows, you'll want to share more. That will come. But first do what you can. Keep at it and grow it bit by bit: "Help me learn to pray", or "Lead my friend to believe in You", or "get me through the day". Hopefully, you'll be able to grow prayer into a part of your daily life, dotting it throughout your day. All great things start somewhere.

Praying Together

Americans and Europeans tend to think of prayer as a solitary thing -- locking yourself into a closet to pray, or maybe heading off into the desert or in a retreat. Private prayer really is important to our relationship with Christ. Yet before it is anything else, prayer is something done with others: the [Body of Christ](#) (that is, the church as the fellowship of believers in Christ). This is the fellowship as it is found around you, wherever you are -- the small group gathering, the people laying hands in prayer on someone in need, the great crowds in auditoriums or tents or arenas, in concerts of prayer, at home, at campus bible studies, in convents, at campgrounds, at prayerwalks, at anti-hunger fundraising events, and more than anywhere else, at the church building during worship.

Praying together was one of the hallmarks of the church from its start. In Acts, they gathered to pray in [the days after Christ's death](#) -- this is even *before* the big event in Acts 2 that started the church as such! Then right after that first event, they [devoted themselves to prayer](#). They prayed praises when [Peter and John were released](#), and then had what amounts to a [group prayer vigil](#) praying for Peter's release from a later imprisonment. When Paul and Barnabas went off on a missionary journey, their host congregation in Antioch [sent them away](#) with prayer and [fasting](#). And, as Paul left Ephesus for Jerusalem, [the Ephesian elders](#) prayed with him for God's leading during that harrowing journey. The early believers wanted to align their steps with God's path, whatever lay ahead.

When you pray in [worship](#), *someone else* is saying, "Let us pray...". You're **not doing your own thing**, you're choosing to join others. You-all are not doing it according to some pattern cooked up the night before, but according to a pattern developed over thousands of years, in a direct line from the public prayers of the people we read about in the Bible. (This was also true of the ancient Hebrews -- their greatest prayers are in their worship writings, the Psalms.)

And how did all those people over all those years develop it? **They gathered** to hear the Word and to do the acts that the Lord had set down for them. They heard, felt, saw, smelled, tasted, and sang God's love. The Spirit knit them together, as in a quilt or tapestry. And they responded in prayer. Their public prayers taught them a lot about what private prayers were about. In public :

- they prayed when they didn't feel like praying;
- they prayed when they didn't want to pray;
- they prayed when they'd really rather do something else;
- they prayed when they had trouble concentrating on praying;
- they prayed when they weren't ready to do it;
- they prayed the Bible by basing their liturgies and readings on the Scriptures;
- they prayed for and with those they were in conflict with;
- they prayed about people and matters that they wouldn't have otherwise thought to pray for or would have forgotten to pray for.

(Well, much of the time they did.)

Sounds like they needed a lot of discipline to pull it off. Right! They learned the basic disciplines of prayer by praying in worship services. They learned that others are praying with them about the concerns they shared. And they discovered that there is great spiritual power when Christ's followers pray together [with unity of purpose](#) (or '[in agreement](#)'). From praying together, they learned that prayer was something far grander than the prayers of any one person. In prayer on their own, they learned that prayer can be as small as two -- you and God -- and that prayer fails to be truly **your** prayer when you aren't intimately involved. The lessons of community prayer feed back into private prayer, and the lessons of private prayer feed back into the community. That way, prayer lives as a whole, much as it was in the Psalms.

Are We Bothering God?

God wants people to pray. Jesus set the example. [He prayed](#). He [taught His followers](#) to pray, and [how not to pray](#). He brought His closest followers with Him to keep watch and to pray, as He began His [hardest day](#) in prayer. The apostles call on believers to be in "unceasing prayer" ([Romans 12:12](#), Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; [Ephesians 6:18](#); [Jude 20](#); 1 Peter 4:7; Philippians 4:6.) Paul was a pray-er, too ([2 Corinthians 13:7](#); [Ephesians 1:16-23](#); [Philippians 1:9](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:11](#)). The early church [urged its members to pray intercessions for all](#). The early church even [prayed for their government's rulers](#), who were often trying to stop them and (rarely) even kill them. Their concerns were not just for their own.

The more your heart opens out to God in prayer, the more that your prayers will buoy your daily life. Spiritual disciplines and practices assist us in this opening-out.

Jesus gives a [great lesson](#) on what prayer is like. It's like the woman who keeps knocking at the door until the judge comes out and addresses her concern, if only just to get rid of those annoying knocks. (Picture Jesus smiling as he tells the story.) But how much more would you be heard by Someone who loves you? Many people today wonder if we should be pestering God with our prayer concerns. The

answer is Scriptural: God says 'pester me'!

Thinking Is Not Praying

There's a big difference between just thinking something and praying it to God. Prayer has a **direction**. You're not churning it in your brain or sharing it with friends or talking it over with a psychologist or getting in touch with your inner self. Prayer is directed to God -- acknowledging not only God's existence, but also a relationship and even a certain degree of trust. Prayer's not a waste of time because God is hard at work in this confused, ambiguous world, to draw it toward God's good purposes. Prayer is your response to God's work. If there's no one there, if there's no way to relate or even communicate, or if a wrathful god would strike you down just for trying, why would anyone pray? There's an unspoken [hope](#) in each prayer, even if it hangs by a thread or is the size of a mustard seed, that somehow the mightiest being of all thinks you matter. God's response also has a direction : you will not be left adrift or be led nowhere (unless, like Israel in the Sinai, you have a lesson to learn from the drifting).

Praying vs. Wishing

Some think praying is a form of wishing. A wish is a desire or longing for some specific thing. Wishful thinking is expressed almost like a petition: I wish I could have it. It's sometimes said aloud so that the wish can be fulfilled by someone -- anyone -- who hears it. A wish is not rooted in reality, but fantasy; it is, as often as not, something the wish-er knows they can't or shouldn't have. You want your wish to come true because it's something that would please *you*. A wish is not entirely a bad thing; it may be the way you dream of what is to come. But if the dream is stuck at the level of being a wish, it will not become anything more than a wish. You have to be part of making it happen. It is merely a 'wish' when you ask God to [send you a woman to love](#), but you rarely leave your apartment and even more rarely speak to a woman. It is merely a 'wish' if you ask to be healthy, but then chain-smoke, lounge on the couch, and pig out on nachos and queso. God does not honor that. God honors it when you start exercising and dieting -- that is, **when you take responsibility for your part in it**.

In prayer, the pray-er specifically trusts **God** with the matter. You're calling on God to act, trusting that God will do what is ultimately best. It is a "Thy will be done" way of being. You're asking God to expand your understanding and insight, to give guidance, to grant forgiveness, to show you what gifts have been given to you, or to act for the sake of someone else. This is not about longings or fleeting concerns or self-puffery. **Prayer is a crucial step in your *doing your part of what God is doing in this world***. For in it, you discover what your part is. Your will may not be done; something better may well be done instead. God makes what is prayed for become real, by working in you *and* in others to make it happen.

There's nothing at all wrong with asking God to let you know if and when what you pray for will be done. Just understand that you might never know. God is under no obligation to you, nor do you have any 'right' to know.

[on the difference between praying and thinking.](#)

There is this very pious Jew named Goldberg who always dreamed of winning the lottery. Every Sabbath, he'd go to synagogue and pray: "God, I have been such a pious Jew all my life. What would be so bad if I won the lottery?" But the lottery would come and Goldberg wouldn't win. Week after week, Goldberg would pray to win the lottery, but the lottery would come and Goldberg wouldn't win. Finally, one Sabbath, Goldberg wails to the heavens and says: "God, I have been so pious for so long, what do I have to do to win the lottery?"

And the heavens parted and the voice of God came down: "Goldberg, give me a chance! *Buy a ticket!*"

-- as told by [Thomas L. Friedman](#), in the **New York Times** op-ed, 03 June 2009

ASKING AMISS

Prayer is no place for illusions. Yet, each of us clings to illusions, and we will end up somehow bringing them into our prayers. This leads to what James called "[asking amiss](#)". The Spirit is working to tell us the truth, and the growth of our prayer relationship with God depends on how well we take heed.

PUPPETEERING

One of the growing problems of the church is that it can't seem to get it through its thick skull that God controls the outcome of prayer. Not the Church, not the minister, not the person who prays. It's not at all rare that a pastor does a [political sermon](#) where he/she is doing nothing more than playing ventriloquist with a dummy labeled 'God'. (Aside from being idolatrous, it's not funny.) So it is also with the "[health and wealth](#)" pseudo-gospel where the church 'prays' with the attitude of a puppeteer : pull the string, and God's hand stretches out to send forth a blessing. God is not a genie in a lamp; our wish is not God's command. God is not a PEZ dispenser, where you lift the head and out comes a treat. If we are asking anything in prayer, we are to be *asking*, not putting in a 1-800 call to a divine telemarketing service or clicking our prayer mouse to reach a multi-level marketer in some level of heaven. (God doesn't outsource divine attention. God receives your prayer call direct.) God is bigger than you, so don't go bossing God around.

USING GOD

Jesus taught us to pray that God's will be done. That means seeking God's purposes instead of seeking

a new car or a passing grade or a fast-track promotion or a miraculous sign. Jesus didn't promise earthly bliss in 30 days or less. Jesus' promises are for [those who abide in Him](#), who put themselves at His service and draw their love from His. There is such a thing as the wrath of God, and one sure way to provoke it is to try to jerk God around for one's own advantage. God has something great in store; pray for it!

THE LAUNDRY LIST MENTALITY

Prayer is **not** a laundry list. It is communication with someone you love and trust. Don't only pray when you want something. Prayer is as much listening ('meditation') as it is talking, as much a sharing as it is a plea for help. Yet, God has asked us (even **dared** us?) to ask. Nothing's too small, too big, too hard, or for that matter too twisted by our selfishness or lack of perception, for God to hear our prayer and take account of it.

God's *here*, in the world in which we live, involved in what's going on. A lot of it flies in the face of divine will, but God's very good at finding ways to make the best of the bad situations created by the [skewed creation](#) we are a part of. Even our own worst foul-ups.

Ask, and ye shall receive -- but often ye shall receive something else that's more in keeping with what God needs from you. And it will come in God's time, not ours. God promises those who believe in Christ a loving response.

LABELS and NAME-CALLING

In the Bible, Jesus shares the story about [a fixture in the religious community](#) who when praying thanked God he is not like that traitorous tax collecting low-life scum over there. It's not only an example of being prideful, it's an example of reducing a person to a category. Categories are useful for understanding data, but they're dreadful for understanding a person. Categories don't tell the truth about people; people just don't fit. You may not be as out front about it as the proud man of the parable. But do you ever pray about people as if they would have some pre-slotted attitude or worth? It's not hard to find people who pray about a "godless liberal" or "heathen" or "hypocrite" or "snob", and so on. But treating people according to a label can be almost as harmful when we mean good by it, because we're not treating that specific person as the person they actually are. It's bad enough that the world around us depersonalizes people; it's sin for followers of Christ to do so, since we know better. Christ died not just for all of us, but for each of us. *Them, too*. Pray like it!

IS IT FAIR TO COMPARE IN PRAYER?

The religious leader of that same parable was doing something else which has no place before God. He was comparing himself (favorably, of course) to someone else. God isn't weighing you against anyone else, no one of today and no one of the past. Like a good mother does with her children, God may not love us all the same, but God loves each of us completely for who we are. If you're someone who is prone to being depressed, among the most common of mental traps is to say, "I'm not as worthy as (someone else)", or "God, why did you make my life so miserable and that jerk's life so happy". That can be a real downer. But that's not how God sees you. Your real worth is what God deems you to be, and how good or bad or happy or pathetic others are just [doesn't matter](#). If that's so,

then there's no reason to let comparison creep into your life, especially not in prayer. All it does is twist what you ask for and dull your response.

IN THIS TOWN, EVERYONE'S GOT A PLAN

Sometimes what you desire is not material at all. Sometimes you just want the sense of control that comes from having everything go according to plan. You believe that if everything follows your plan, it will work out best overall for yourself and those you care about, progressing as it should. Or so you think. So you pray an argument with God, trying to convince God that you have it right, that you know the way to go, trying to talk God into giving your plan a divine blessing. Once again, we forget who is the God here. Our plans are awfully puny when stood next to God's; they're all twisted up in curly-queues, driven by motives deeper than we're aware of, not big enough where big counts, not detailed enough where it matters, not wise enough to prevent us from looking really stupid. The Lord already has a plan under way, called "the Kingdom of God". It's the plan that *will* take effect, with or without you, like it or not. Thank God for that, or we'd really be sunk! Pray instead that God will guide you into the part of the plan that was designed for you.

"I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day."

Abraham Lincoln

Praying For Enemies

When you pray the prayer Jesus taught His disciples, you ask God to forgive you as you forgive those who wrong you. It says nothing about those who wrong you forgiving you, or changing their mind about you. It says nothing about those who wrong you asking you -- or even God -- for forgiveness. What 'they' do is not in the picture. It has no part in your being forgiven by God. It does not affect your need and your duty before God to forgive others. A 12-step observation can be made here : you can't change someone else, you can only change yourself. (Whether your changes change others is between them and God, and is not set by you.) Forgiveness does not cause reconciliation. If the other party has not forgiven, or if either party has not taken steps beyond forgiveness to cause change in the situation, there is no reconciliation. But forgiveness is the essential step. It is where you are being led as the Spirit likens you to Christ. Christ bids us to turn around our thinking toward others. The Lord's prayer isn't a call to pretend we are not being wronged, or to be silent or still as others are wronged. The wrong is still there, and the wrong is still every bit as wrong. But in forgiveness, we share the grace God gave to us for the wrongs we did. Jesus taught us to pray for God to give us what it takes to do so.

Who Does God Hear?

God hears our prayers, whomever we are. I myself would even say (as an opinion) that God hears the true prayers of the non-Christian -- certainly a faithful Jew or Muslim. God heard [the pleas of Cain](#) for safety, and Cain didn't care about God. A God who is deaf to the cries of a animist mother whose son is dying is a very different sort of god than the Father who sent His own son to die to save the human race. The One we pray to [sends rain and sunshine to the evil as well as the good](#), and calls on us to love our enemies because that's how God loves. The Lord will at least communicate, though the conversation would go differently with those who don't believe. I get the feeling that when God hears some major Christian leader say who is and isn't heard in prayer, God thinks, 'Oh, yeah? Who are **you** to tell **Me** who to listen to?'. God's reply is different, the non-Christian's response is different, but the Lord cares about all of us [sinners](#), whether we accept God's forgiveness and new life or not. Prayer's power comes from **God's** love and **God's** [promises](#), not ours. The difference with the believing Christian is that God **promised us** full attention and a loving reply to our prayers, and we can live in that promise. The believing Christian doesn't pray to a Remote Unknown God-Machine which receives our pleas. When the Christian prays, it's to a Father who hears His Son's voice speaking for and with us.

The Heart Stuff

A lot of people have in their mind the stuff of faith. But how can you move from that 'head stuff' to a living faith? Prayer, before anything else. In prayer we go from thinking about or talking about God or even talking to God, to talking **with** God and listening when God calls. It's a [trust commitment](#) in one whom we cannot see and cannot hear, who we cannot by normal earthly means even know is there. We pray trusting, or maybe just hoping, that God will act on what we pray about. We respond to the Lord's proven love by depending on God to respond within our daily lives. The life of faith is a life of trusting that God is at work on your concerns, or is at least working on you.

When you rediscover that the world around you is both natural and [supernatural](#), then it makes sense that prayer has great value as spiritual communication. You begin to **want** to pray, and **look forward** to private or [group](#) time in prayer.

Praying and the Spirit

Traditionally, when Christians have prayed involving the Holy Spirit, we've prayed an *epiclesis*. That's fancy God-talk for saying that the prayers are a plea to the Father to fill us with the Spirit. In [liturgical](#) churches, the key epiclesis is found in the thanksgiving prayer before [Holy Communion](#) is given out. In some charismatic churches, an important epiclesis happens right before the sermon. The worshippers will come forward to make a huddle around the preacher, praying that the Spirit moves through the preacher and sermon. Every once in a while, a song will give praise to the Spirit, but most churches only do that once we've already said praises to the Father and to the Son. Almost no other churchly prayers or songs directly address the Spirit. This gives many people the impression that the Spirit is somehow third-rate. Today's liturgists and worship leaders have a long way to go to change that picture.

Christians don't pray to the Spirit to confess our sins nor do they plea to the Spirit for forgiveness. As Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer, prayers go to the Father, so that the Son may step in for us now as He did when on earth. The different persons of the [Trinity](#) are most involved in different things. The [Spirit](#) moves you to turn to God in prayer and repentance, brings to your mind that there is hope in doing so, and makes you aware of the truth and the need. The Spirit prays with you, and when you reach the point where your prayers get stopped by human limits, the Spirit picks it up and keeps it running, "[with sighs too deep for words](#)". But don't think rigidly about these roles. *All* of the triune God is at work in your prayers. If you pray to the Spirit, God responds just as well as if you prayed to the Father. The pattern is there not for God, but for us and our own feeble grasp of the mysteries of how God works in prayer.

Prayer and Charismatics

The early years of the charismatic renewal were especially prayer-packed. An outsider could easily have seen the charismatic movement as a prayer movement. The prayer meeting was the charismatic renewal's beehive. It was the main activity for their gathering, their nurture, and for their spreading around. Several people would gather, often at someone's home, on their own accord, just to pray. Eventually, the groups got larger as more people came, and the scene shifted to churches. In the movement's heyday, there was a prayer group praying somewhere in many major cities, at any time, every day. Even on the overnight shift! (Shades of the prayer vigils of the Herrnhut of Zinzendorf's followers!) After many years of quieting down, once again young Christians from all over the world are holding every moment in prayer. There aren't as many of them as some published reports would lead us to believe, but then it has always been the work of the few. They've just returned to work.

The charismatic movement is prayerful before it is anything else. However, they're finding it harder to keep it up nowadays, because there's so much more to do: prayer conferences and prayer books and videos and web sites and teaching-programs and classes and church activities and stadium meetings and worship music CDs and visiting preachers and politics and warfare strategizing. Let's not forget WWJD bracelets and angel-on-my-shoulder jewelry. Oh yes -- with all sorts of stuff *about* prayer and about *someone else's* powerful prayer ministry.

The Devil will do anything to get our mind off of our really praying or really serving.

There's No Star System

Prayer heroes are all around us

Throughout Christian history, there have been stories of people whose prayers are astoundingly effective, lead to amazing insight, and bring about the smaller turning points that make up the meat of history. In the Book of Kings, Elijah prays and God makes incredible things happen. Revivals were

started by prayer leaders, whether it be the renewal ministry of Francis of Assisi, or the start of Luther's Reformation, or the first Great Awakening of Jonathan Edwards, or the birth of the Charismatic movement. Today, there are some leaders whom many people look up to as powerful "prayer warriors". Yet, the star syndrome is not what any true pray-er is about. In his letter, James ([5:16-17](#)) writes in praise of Elijah's powerful prayers, but then says that Elijah had "a nature like us". Nothing was essentially different about him, save that Elijah was a righteous man living his calling, who passionately prayed to the God he served and loved. When I think of modern-day prayer heroes, I sometimes think of the grandmothers of Russia who, since their youth, had kept their nation in prayer and quietly tended to the fires of the church while the Communists oppressed and tried to kill the church's public life. These women had little else but faithful prayer, but they kept it up. And won. Anyone can be a mighty prayer warrior. You can be one. But you can't hear that and just say, 'That's what I want to be right now'. It takes hard work to be God's. You don't [name it and claim it](#), you grow and mature into it.

Pray Without Ceasing

[Frank Laubuch](#) (in his 'experiments'), [Brother Lawrence](#) (in his daily routines), and the early Hasidic leaders, each found different ways to pray while working, walking, in conversational breaks, cleaning up, cooking, and so on. You, too, have lots of opportunities for short sentence prayers of thanks or concern. For instance :

- while sitting on a commuter train;
- while waiting at a doctor's office;
- during TV commercials (just hit the mute button and close your eyes for a moment);
- in any queue or line.

The more you pray in places outside of church or home, the more naturally Christ will come to mind there. All settings are settings for prayer. It will seem much less like a separate, Godless world, and more of a whole in which the Spirit is afoot everywhere.

One traditional way of doing this is to pray the [daily office of the hours](#). In this, the prayers are scheduled at specific times throughout the day. In the tradition of Benedict, these prayer times each have a name : the Lauds (morning praise), Prime (before starting out your work day, around six am or breakfast), Terce (around 9 am or the start of work), Sext (noon, or around lunch), None (3 to 4 pm, or at the end of the workday), Vespers (6 to 8 pm), and Compline (bedtime), as well as Vigil (if you're awake during the night). A Scripture reading and short section of liturgy may be said, as well as prayer. But even the most non-liturgical Christians generally pray at wake-up and at bedtime. Jews and Muslims also have traditionally-set times for prayer.

Setting a schedule helps to create a habit or pattern of prayer, and turns the believer back to God throughout the day. It's not about how you do it or how many times a day you do it, it's about turning to God in the midst of what you do during the day, helping to keep the whole day in prayer. Many find

it helpful to give each prayer time a separate focus. For instance, a daytime worker would set up the day ahead at midmorning by praying about each item on the schedule, and the mid-afternoon prayer would be to help them leave their job behind in mind and body (some people find it difficult to let go of their work).

"The Apostle Paul had a purpose in saying: 'Pray without ceasing'. Are we then to ceaselessly bend our knees, to lie prostrate, or to lift up our hands? there is another, interior kind of prayer without ceasing, namely, the desire of the heart. ... The constancy of your desire will itself be the ceaseless voice of your prayer."

Augustine of Hippo

Some books that may help you learn to 'pray without ceasing' (or something like that) :

Brother Lawrence (Nicholas Herman), orig. edited by the Abbé Joseph de Beaufort, *The Practice Of the Presence of God* (1692). English translation: John Delaney, with foreword by Henri Nouwen (Doubleday/Image, 1977)

Jean-Pierre deCaussade, *The Sacrament Of the Present Moment* (Harper & Row, 1982)

Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (Paulist, 1978)

Thomas Kelly, *A Testament Of Devotion* (Harper & Row, 1941)

Frank Laubach, *Letters By A Modern Mystic* (New Readers Press, 1979)

Writings From the Philokalia, Kadlovbovsky/Palmer transl. (Faber & Faber, 1975)

The Jesus Prayer

The Eastern Orthodox have long been praying something called the 'Jesus Prayer'. The prayer itself goes like this : "Lord Jesus Christ" (while breathing in), "have [mercy](#) on me, a sinner" (while breathing out). This is done repeatedly until all is stilled within. As it is repeated, it often unconsciously reduces down to "Jesus" in and "mercy" out. If other things come to mind, stop it and return to the prayer. The Jesus Prayer grew out of [Luke 18:13](#). Prayers that use breathing this way probably go far back in history, with early breath-prayers based on the refrains of the Psalms. They are brief, simple expressions of the longings of the heart of the devout, tied into the one thing you can't stop doing when in prayer. Remember, there's nothing magical about the Jesus Prayer or any other breath-prayers. As with any other devotion, if after a while of doing it, it just lays there for you, or if you start getting superstitious or dogmatic about it, you can stop doing it. You're being led elsewhere. For some people, the Jesus Prayer is their way into full meditative prayer.

Reading the Bible Prayerfully

Private, prayerful Bible reading is intimate and personal. It's like exploration - it takes daunt and

derring-do to dare to do it right. Be fearless -- ask God to show you, through the text. The very act of telling God about it turns even your bitterest thoughts into a strange kind of prayer. God's seen much worse out of us. You won't be struck by lightning for having even thought of what you're thinking. The decision to [entrust](#) God with the matter turns the strongest [doubt](#) into an act of faith and the most stubborn question into a plea of faith.

Much of the Bible is actually made up of prayers. Many of the Psalms and sections of the histories and the Prophets are prayers. The New Testament letters contain short prayers, such as the one in [Ephesians 3:14-21](#). The best-known prayer in Scripture is [the one that Jesus taught](#).

The Bible can also be the hub of your own prayers. No method is needed, but for some of us, a method may help us stay focused, disciplined, and open-hearted. One of the oldest is 'Lectio Divina' (divine reading), and it's geared toward helping us listen to the Spirit that speaks through Scripture. One form of it goes like this : first, [quiet](#) your mind down. If you find that hard to do, it often helps that you focus on taking deep breaths. Once you're gotten some focus, begin softly speaking a chosen Bible passage. Then, read it again real slow, this time listening for a word or phrase that stirs you, speaking again and again until one stands out. Then stay with that word or phrase, and ask why the Spirit is stirring you with it. Take what you're thinking, feeling, and remembering, and offer it back to God in prayer. Then repeat the process. You'll be finished when you get a sense of peace about it. Or, you may finish with a sense of exhausted disturbance, in which you know you've poured it out for now, but you're still being stirred in a way that may only be resolved as the day goes on. (If so, keep going back to that word or phrase throughout the day, and see what it has to do with your life.) Most people who use some version of the Lectio find that at some time during it, the Spirit reveals something about living the faith.

a site with helps on daily devotions involving the Lectio: <http://www.lectiodivina.org/>
Sacred Space.ie is an Irish Jesuit site operating short online prayer and devotional sessions

Praying To Wake Up the Dead (Church)

I've had this happen many times, and you've probably come across this too. (So have many who now avoid church like the plague.) You walk into a church event or a worship service, and you sense an overwhelming deadness. And you know it's not your imagination or your spiritual pride kicking in. When you're sitting among those frozen chosen, what can you do?

First : **pray**. Pray that God uses you or anyone else to breathe the Spirit into the place. Pray for those up front who are doing what they're doing: liturgical assistants, facilitators, eucharistic celebrants, and so on. Pray for the preachers and speakers (but not so much that you're too busy praying to listen). Then, pray a moment for each person around you. (This is best done with eyes open.) Fan out from there, to each person further and further away, until you've prayed for each person at the event or service. Second : **sing**. You don't have to be a good singer, just an energetic one who can come reasonably close to pitch. (If you're clearly pitch-impaired, don't sing; you'll only inspire thoughts of murder not divinity.) If they're singing the same old hymns or praise songs and just going through the motions, sing boldly. If they're just blurting out the liturgical cants, belt out your response parts. God

can use prayer and music to light a fire under anything.

Praying Evangelistically

If you're one of those who is scared of talking to others about Christ, or if you're in a situation where such talk would make matters worse, try this : *pray for them*. Let's say, you've just encountered someone at work. After they're gone, give a quick, silent prayer that God would act in their lives in a way that brings the Gospel to the front where they can't avoid it.

Sometimes, struggle gives an open door. You'd be surprised how many people would pray with you for themselves if you asked. Especially when something tense or stressful is happening to someone, if you ask to pray with them, odds are they'll say yes. And they'll feel better about it afterward. This is true for most people, even those with weak or no specific belief in God. They're often just happy to have your attention. Remember not to press the matter : hesitation should be taken as a 'no'. Even if not, you can still pray for them on your own, both for their situation and for God to use it to show them Christ.

Prayer Tweets

I'm not one for being trendy, but the new social networks make for some fine new opportunities for prayer. Twitter's tweets, in particular, have unique strengths. Tweets are limited to very short messages, so prayer tweets must also be short and direct, with no bull (unless the prayer itself is). This means the prayer has to be focused, which in turn forces you to be *more aware* of your prayers and your patterns of concern throughout the day. Those who follow your tweets and are set up for your prayers can then act as your prayer circle, to pray with you. Those prayers can also be *passed along* from your friends to their friends, and so on, so that in moments thousands could be praying in agreement with you. You can even use the listed friends as a prayer list that you pray for (off phone), one by one. One caveat is that social networking can become addictive -- you may be tempted to make it *most* of your praying. Many matters of life are not short or simple, and they need to be wrestled with, and that takes time that Twitter or Facebook or any other on-line communications method can't provide. You must learn for yourself how to sort which sort of prayer belongs where.

Why Pray in Small Groups?

Christians pray alone. They pray in large groups in worship, and sometimes even fill stadiums to pray together. But today's Christians often find their strongest moments of prayer in small groups with a few other believers. They do other things in a small group, too : Bible study, singing, and just being a small community together with each other. Prayer is a part of a larger **small-group** picture.

Small-group prayer is very flexible. Most of what is done in private prayer or in public worship prayer or concerts of prayer can also be done in small groups. Plus there's the flexibility to go from one way

of praying to another, which keeps giving different angles to our small-collective relationship with God. Each group develops its own rhythm, style, schedule, and history. If it is a group that meets on a regular basis, it needs a clear purpose that the members invest themselves in.

Pre-prayer discussions

One of the most important times for a prayer group actually takes place *before* prayers. At that time, discuss what you're going to pray about. Have anyone present share burdens or give praise, always being encouraged to be specific rather than general. This enables the group to pray "in agreement", together in hopes and goals. Also, different aspects of complicated prayer subjects can be given out to different people. That's not to say that the prayers should be limited only to what's been discussed. Believers are often [moved by the Spirit](#) to take a different direction. The pre-prayer discussion is not there to put a straightjacket on prayer time, but to better inform and to clear the air.

People in a prayer group are free not to take part in any particular prayer or any specific exercise or approach. Most often, they'll just opt-out by shutting off their mouths and minds without anyone knowing about it. But sometimes, the objection comes out in the open. When it does, before going into prayer, find out why, and what lies behind it. The group may agree to adjust, or further discussion is needed, especially if it is [divisive](#). The discussion can teach valuable lessons about the group's character and about prayer. Sometimes the best solution is for the member to exercise their right not to take part in that particular prayer or method, and for the rest to continue on.

Formats and Methods

Most prayer group activities are done in a ring or circle. It's the most natural formation to take : each one faces most of the others, looking them in the face. It is a visible oneness (the ring) with visible parts (each person). It becomes even more so when the hands are linked, since the people next to you in a ring, the two folks you're least likely to be looking at, are the ones drawn to you by touch. Some see something mystical about the ring/circle, but its 'magic' is really simple human togetherness -- [unity](#). God takes that and blesses it, since it's what God hopes to create between us. That is what makes prayers powerful.

The procedure that most people find most natural is to stand together in a ring, and have each person share for however long is needed, then going to the next person in the ring, until done. If hands are linked, one person can pass their turn on to the next simply by squeezing the next person's hand or softly saying something. Another common way is for each to share freely, in no particular order, waiting until the person speaking is done. Those who have experience in leading groups say that these are fine ways to begin, but it tends to become a rut, or concentration spans lapse. It helps to move from one procedure of prayer to another. For example :

Sentence prayers : each person, one at a time, offers a brief specific concern, praise, or thanks to God, ending with "[Amen](#)" or some other refrain. No explaining it, just saying it and leaving it. (Allow those who don't want to share to say just "Amen" so it passes on to the next person.)

Silent intercessions : The leader reads a general concern, and is then silent. Time is

then taken to silently pray for specific people, actions, and ministries involved with that general concern. Then, after a while, the leader speaks a word of the Bible relating to that concern, and a brief prayer on it.

Basket of prayer : each person writes just one concern that is most on their heart, onto a slip of paper. The papers are gathered in a basket, and the group prays over them. This can be done by reading each one or leaving them unread all together in the basket.

Prayer for witness : Each person in the group names *one* person that they most want to see turn to Christ. This would be someone from work, hobbies, family, or other non-religious activities, that they meet in the course of their daily lives. After each one is spoken, the group then prays for an opportunity for a Christian's witness to hit home.

Two-by-two : at the start, names are randomly drawn to be matched in pairs. The pairs then go to separate locations from the other pairs (like, say, one in the kitchen, another on the deck, another in the garden, etc.). The pair then takes time to minister, share, and pray with each other.

Echos : Someone speaks a phrase of Psalm or hymn or a very specific prayer. Then each person repeats the phrase, with short breaks in between each time it is spoken. This gives everyone time to think on the phrase, or to silently let it sink in, listening for some stirrings within.

Groups confessing : one approach is for a leader to talk briefly about a general kind or category of sin. All those present write onto slips of paper a few words of a specific instance where they committed that kind of sin. These are *not* to be read by anyone; this is between them and God. The papers are then gathered into a cooking container. All those present gather around it, and speak together a prayer of confession of being sorry for that kind of sin and expressing the determination to cease that sin. Then all take the container to a safe place indoors or outdoors, and then someone lights it, allowing it to burn completely to ash. (Have something to douse or smother it with in case of flare-up.) Once this is done, someone then says that these sins are forgiven due to Christ's work on the cross.

Strong personal needs : Sometimes, in a group setting, someone will be so hurt by life (or so moved by the group or its actions) that they will break down. Other times, composure will hold, but the need for prayer is acute and prayer is requested. Either way, see to it that the person is sitting down securely. (This sitting is known in some circles as the '**hot seat**'.) Ask that person to start praying. Then bring the others present to gather around him/her, laying hands and praying until a sense of comfort about the matter comes over him/her, or that person brings it to an end.

Written responsory prayers : Those in liturgical churches know these from worship services. A petition is offered, then ended with a clear ending tag, like, "O Lord" or "in Jesus' name", followed by a standard response spoken by all, such as "hear our prayer" or "let it happen, Lord". Then the next written petition is spoken, and so on. (The tags

and response can be much less mundane than that. But simple often works best.)

When You Pray Aloud

In group prayer, there's usually time set aside for silent prayer. But most groups spend most of their prayer time **praying aloud**. That is how those in the group become able to pray together, at once, on one matter, in agreement. Each of us have our own strange ways of praying. That's good, because that's really you praying to God. But some of us will tend to do something else when praying aloud:

- preach
- teach
- give advice
- give pastoral-style counseling
- pass along information
- give a political speech
- talk of glory, success, or blessings.

Many of us can't turn off our awareness that it's a captive audience -- they're all listening, but they'd find it hard to get themselves to talk back. They're trying to focus on God, but they can't, because their thoughts are being led somewhere else. Look again at what's being said -- those are not prayers at all. They're not directed toward God but to the group. God doesn't need to hear the gospel, doesn't need our counsel at all, and needs our personal or political posturing even less. So who is it for? Such talk too often uses the words "they" and "them", as in "Them vs. Us" or "those poor deluded souls who think such-and-such". Is that really a plea to the Almighty? Or is it a call for group bigotry?

When you pray aloud in a group, there are some basic rules to follow. The first and foremost of these is to **address God**, and *no one else*. If it's not being said to God, it does not belong in prayer time. If you're saying a lot of "me" or "we" (especially when combined with "should" or "must"), or a frequent "I" that's not confessing, then it's not being said to God. The second is like unto it: **keep it simple**. The more you drone on, the longer and more fully explained it gets, the more everyone's mind will wander from the task at hand. If you have to explain it, it's too complex, and it's being directed toward the others and not God. If the petition is not simple in its nature, then **talk about it before prayer time**. That not only prevents wandering, but gets others more involved in that specific petition.

Praying from Broad to Specific

Without a deliberate effort to keep prayer concerns as wide as God's world, groups (and people) tend to get ever narrower in what they pray about. This can be prevented by creating a structure in which a broad range of concerns are addressed each meeting. Most common is to start with praise, then introspective and contemplative prayer, then move to prayers for self and family, then intercessions for each other and the faith challenges/opportunities faced each day, then the congregation, then the community at large, the nation, and the world. Then, bring the focus back down to one: Jesus. Then, end with prayers of thanks and praise.

No matter how broad the prayer concern is, the prayers need to be specific. God didn't incarnate as a generic human, but came to be like us. And we are specific beings: our life events, experiences, hopes,

and needs are all tied to specific times, places, people, and decisions. Even on the broadest of matters. The same goes for our prayers. So it's not "Hold Dick's family together", but "Give Dick patience and insight, give Jen focus and fortitude; rebuild the love between them." Or, it's not "grant peace in Palestine", but "release the hostages recently taken near Nablus, help alleviate the maze of travel checkpoints, comfort the family of Moishe and the others who lost loved ones in yesterday's bombing, and bring jobs to those in poverty, especially Khalil and his son". God's already connected to us, and God is connected to them; the cycle is incomplete until *we* are connected to them. For that to happen, we have to care enough to get down to the details. If you know that a certain general subject will come up in prayer, someone in the group should take on the task of finding out more, to focus in on what the specific needs are, and then share that with the group in its pre-prayer discussions.

Size and Purpose

There's more about small group intercession in the intercessory prayer pages -- <http://www.spirithome.com/prayintr.html>. A group can be focused as an intercessor group, but they usually have much more to them than their prayer task, such as friendship, accountability, Bible study, and faith education. The patterns and balance will change with time and with new members.

A prayer circle of 5 to 12 people is about the right size. If it's smaller, it will sputter when members are absent, and will tend to think in a more ingrown way. If it's larger, the members lose touch with each other, or prayer time can get too complex and wearying. If the group gets too big, try splitting it into two groups that meet separately, each led by someone who has had responsibilities in the original group. Then pray that each group grows. It's a good idea for the groups to keep in touch regularly after that, exchanging prayer concerns and/or taking on a service activity together.

BODY POSITIONS FOR PRAYER

People pray in many physical positions. For instance:

- **laying flat** on the floor, face down, with hands stretched out (also known as '*prostrate*');
- **standing**, hands raised and spread, palms up, looking upward;
- **sitting**, head bowed, eyes closed, hands folded (the most common position today);
- **kneeling**, head bowed, hands folded;
- **kneeling**, head to the ground, hands face down on ground next to head;
- **standing**, eyes forward, facing the altar;
- **sitting** eyes closed, hands in front, palms up;
- **laying flat** on the floor, face up, palms up;
- **slow leisurely walking** (or sitting), eyes open, in a place where one can safely pay very little attention to where one is going.

Each of these body positions (and others) can be done for any kind of praying, but each has special meaning for different kinds of prayer. [Standing](#) with hands raised is typical of praise, celebrative prayer, and thanks-giving. [Kneeling](#) and [prostration](#) show [humility](#) and recognition of a superior, and

thus are especially well-suited to prayers of confession, repentance, or awe. (If you're someone who bows to no one, please consider praying while **laying prostrate. In public. With everyone watching.** If you're too proud to do that, you're too proud to speak to God.) Slow wandering and lotus-sitting are especially good for meditational prayer and for quieting yourself so you can listen. [Standing facing the altar](#) is part of an act of worship with other people who are also worshipping. Other positions have been used, too; for example, Elijah [crouched low to the ground](#) and put his face between his knees. (He must've been a prayer contortionist.) The Bible doesn't mention arm gestures in prayer except the raising of hands; however, starting as early as 800 AD and maybe earlier, some devout Jews have been known to sway while studying the Torah, chanting Psalms, or praying. Christians praying together are known to link hands and raise them together.

These positions can help you pray right, by getting your body into (or, sometimes, out of the way of) your prayers, and as a way to express what the prayer is for. Prayer is done with your whole self, and the body is part of that. But **the body positions themselves are unimportant to God**, who has seen them all before and has seen liars and fools use them all. They are useful to know for *your own* benefit. The key is that you are having a living response with God, speaking and listening. Whatever prayer position your body is in, God is still paying attention. And that is ultimately what counts.

A good set of experiential prayers (prayers that involve the body and the physical senses) is found at the **Embody.co.uk** site. You may laugh over a few of these. A few others are more of a meditation than a prayer. These prayers are not just 'experiential', they're 'experimental', and they're a wonderful example of faithful risk-taking and discovery. These experiences carry forward a true sense of prayer. In several of them, ritual and symbol are well-used for what they are meant to do, something that's usually lost in pop-ritual and by ritualists. My favorite is listed as "Body Prayer"; it's in the spirit of early Celtic Christian prayers, but acted out with the body and with open hands faced out and placed together in a triangular (Trinity) shape. As the Embody site describes it :

"Stand up with your arms straight out to your side and your palms pointing to the ceiling and pray: "Creator God". Bring your hands together in front of you, forming a triangle with your thumbs and forefingers, and pray: "The three in one". Keeping the triangle shape, move your hands down to touch the ground and pray: "Be in this place". Stand up again and place the triangle over your chest praying, "Be in my heart", and over your forehead praying, "Be in my mind". Take the triangle above your head and pray: "I love you and adore you". Bring your hands down to the starting point and you can start to pray again."

An experience in praying while in operation

Back some 20 years ago, I started **praying during bike rides**. (This, at the suggestion of a Third Order Franciscan.) The trick is to stop before you pray, then start riding again as you finish one prayer,

stopping and starting in a controlled, regular fashion. It takes discipline to keep the functions separated. The first few days, it worked well and felt great. Then, it started becoming more dangerous, because my mind would keep wandering back to God at *unexpected, unplanned* times so I wasn't paying attention to where I was going. With each close call I would tell myself to pay more attention and exert more discipline. I stopped biking my prayers after jumping a curb, crossing someone's driveway while they were backing up, and landing in thorn bushes on the other side.

Fool that I am, I then decided to try something less hazardous: I'd pray while taking a walk, or more accurately, **meandering**. Same discipline, less risk. But I live in a suburb. I'd have to go a mile or so to get to a good place to walk around at a normal pace. So (duh...) I chose to walk to the school grounds. Once again, once I started thinking about God, I would not keep my mind off God, even on my way there. I stopped that when I walked into the school's perimeter fence one day, and into a parked car the next. I discovered that prayer shtick doesn't work.

I still occasionally use my current landlord's ample back yard woods, where I can meander aimlessly, slowly, and safely -- though I did walk into a tree once and another time stepped on a squirrel. But mostly, I stay stationary when praying. I don't want to put God to the test by in effect demanding a miracle healing each time I move about.

Hanging Out

Three preachers were discussing the best body positions for prayer, while a utility repairman was working close by. One of the preachers said, "I find kneeling gets the best feeling".

"No", another jumped up. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven."

"Both of you miss the mark", the third shot back. "Prayer's most effective when lying prostrate, face down on the floor."

The repairman had heard enough of this. "Hey, y'all," he stepped in, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole."

A Place to Pray

In past eras when crime inside churches was rare, the church sanctuaries were open most, and often all, of the time, ready for anyone with spiritual needs to come in and pray in peace. As with everything else nowadays, the fears, expense, staffing and effort to do that is too much for most congregations. But then, **where can we pray?** Anywhere, I suppose, but the rest of our lives and our world get in the way. There is still a need for a place to go, set aside for the purpose of praying, set up to help us in the act of praying. Often, this would be an outdoor area, such as [at a riverside](#), or (as in Korea) on a hill on or near the site, or (as for the English) in a garden, or (especially in Africa) under large shady trees, for morning prayer and meditation. A few believer's groups have put praying spaces

and prayer vigil sites [in unexpected places](#), along the mean streets, in the shopping malls and outlet centers, and in the hubs of hedonism.

Prayer Rooms for Congregations

A growing proportion of churches are setting aside a special room solely for the purpose of prayer. There are several models for this, each reflecting a different approach to prayer. These are places to *actually pray*, rather than places to think about or learn about prayer.

In the **prayer closet** model, a small room is chosen. It is designed to be a private room for prayer, though it needs to be large enough for at least two so a comforting presence can be given to those who need it, or perhaps for prayers of confession. This style is best when it is in a stripped-down form: a padded kneeler, a basic altar-like area with a cross on or behind it, a pair of soft-seated folding chairs, a box of tissues. A less basic approach would add sound-deadening walls or sound-canceling headphones to provide maximum silence for the praying person. Some churches would find the prayer closet to be too individualistic, a me-and-God way of faith, but if it is part of a congregation's wider prayer practices, it does not have to be so. Most churches lack the space or money for much more than this sort of a room; it is sometimes quite literally a former utility closet.

In the **larger prayer room** model, the room is large enough to do some walking around in, maybe large enough for several different things to be happening at once. It always has an outside door (so it can be used when the rest of the building is locked), but might not have an inside door (for security reasons). The key to the larger prayer room is that there are many possible choices that can be used for making it a place amenable to prayer. Some ideas:

- It may have the walls set up in sections, each dedicated to some different aspect of prayer: prayer for missions and missionaries in one section, prayer for the church's staff in another, still another for posting prayer requests.
- One spot might have icons, headphone music and art for contemplative prayer.
- Another might have a place to post answered prayers and other thanksgivings.
- a section for prayer journaling with a table, pad, pencils and such.
- there may be written or (through headphones) audio guidance for those who are confused or inexperienced about prayer. (Any helps within the room should be geared toward leading the person into actual prayer, not for educating them for later prayer. The latter should be done elsewhere.)
- a part of the room may even be quickly adapted as an "E.R." or emergency-room section with assigned prayer ministers and an emergency phone for 'stat-calling' a prayer helper for immediate help if noone else is there.
- If the room is large enough, there may be a labyrinth that courses through a changing set of prayer challenges and hard questions about life, prayer, and God.

One advantage to the larger setup is that any one element in the room can be changed, removed, or modified while leaving the rest as-is. A room that changes is more likely to be a room that's used, over time.

Noone that I know of has the whole idea in effect on a long-term basis, though many elements of this

are now becoming more common among the larger non-denominational congregations and in several urban prayer ministries. Something like it can be adapted to places outside of the parish grounds, or be designed for use by those who are allergic to churchy formats, especially at events.

The oldest of the current models is that of the **prayer chapel**, most commonly found in parishes of the ['liturgical' churches](#). It is set up like a small sanctuary, with an altar that has the Bible and (actual or symbolic) [Eucharist elements](#), sometimes a baptismal [font](#), hymnals, and (unfortunately) several rows of pews. The walls would have stations of the cross, or icons or other contemplative faith-art, or congregationally-made paintings and banners. The chapel room can be used for small weddings and specialized worship services. (Some see that as an advantage, others as a problem.) While this model is good with liturgicals like me, for many others its churchy atmosphere will cause the wrong kind of discomfort.

Prayer Stations

A "prayer station" is usually a place set aside for prayer in the back or sides of the [worship](#) hall / sanctuary. It can be set up with a combination of candles, crosses, icons, Scripture passages, devotional questions, a prayer notebook (for sharing thoughts and asking questions), a box for prayer requests, photos, art, video images, music (through headphones), and a soft place to kneel or sit. (You don't need to have all of these, just what is right for your church.) Have in it only what's directly for use in prayer and meditation; it is dedicated to and focused *only* on prayer. It can be as simple as a portable kneeler and/or basic altar. Many places that have prayer stations allow people to use the stations freely, even during worship services, sermons, classes, and meetings. There may even be a trained prayer helper "on duty" to pray with you. This not only shows prayer's high priority, but (more importantly) puts this space at the ready for the moments when the Spirit is touching us. There must be strict rules, though, against using it as an area to chat in. There are other places for that. If other people are led to pray there, they will see the chatterers and walk away.

One or more of these options may suit your parish especially well. A congregation with a place for prayer in its churchly life needs a place designated for prayer in its churchly facilities.

Prayer Information Centers

There's also a need for a place where anyone can find information about prayer and prayer ministries. The best place for this is somewhere near the place set aside for prayer, but not directly *in* it, in the form of a kiosk or table. Do you want to learn more about:

- the church's prayer opportunities and prayer leaders?
- prayer in the Bible?
- [what prayer is](#) and why Christians pray?
- how to [start praying](#) as a part of daily living?
- prayer disciplines?
- answers to prayer, as reported by church members?
- how to get in touch with a [prayer chain](#) or with intercessors?

- devotional materials?
- signup boards for a prayer [vigil](#)?

If your church is serious about prayer, it needs a place where people can do their own self-starting on the road to a prayerful life, a place that is ready when they need it. Prayer can be safe, easy, and natural for people to do. A wise congregation will give people every opportunity to do it, and take down any barriers that might stop them.

Prayer Walls and Boards

One of the tools that praying [parishes](#) have found most helpful is the prayer wall or bulletin board. It's space set aside for posting what's been happening on a specific prayer concern of the congregation, usually where the prayer information is. The news may be an update on the condition of a cancer patient. It may be word from former members who moved to Arizona, that they've settled in safely. It may be praising God for a new job, or for healing, or for a new baby. When they go to or leave worship services, people will see the board, and thus also see that the prayers are having an impact. It gives everyone something to praise about. A few pastors have tried to use it as a place to put thinly-disguised announcements or commentaries; when that's done, the wall becomes distrusted or ignored and won't have its intended effect.

Walls can be done within prayer rooms, too, but the purpose is different. It too can be used for prayer news and praises, but it must follow the rule for anything in the prayer room -- it is there to **foster actual prayer that gets prayed when in the room**. That means no theological lessons or speeches, just bare information, or perhaps, the story that goes with it. There are four walls in a prayer room, but some of those might have uses that might not make the wall adaptable for this use. In that case, you can use a partition that can be used easily for posting. One church I know of took an old mailbox, split the sections smaller, and made it a 'wailing wall' of sorts, where people would stuff their requests on small slips of paper. Another church has a map of the world, with an information book on the nations of the world, so that people can pray for that nation's believers and for God to help the nation meet its needs and heal its wounds. The possibilities are limited only by our stiffened imaginations.

Prayer Centers for Events

Once a prayer place is created, it can become the ideal hub for a more specialized use of prayer. It can become the place for:

- a seasonal prayer vigil (like, say, during [Lent](#));
- a crisis prayer vigil (for instance, on a large scale, Hurricane Katrina or 9/11, or on a smaller scale, the health of a parishioner or pastor);
- a 24/7 prayer event (where a congregation, or preferably many congregations acting together, has a rotating schedule of people praying for whatever purposes, including prayer just to settle out their own lives).

Remember that a prayer place can be set up temporarily so that people at large public gatherings can pray if needed. It can be geared toward the common needs and the culture of those who attend the

gatherings. These can be treated within your congregation as a scheduled prayer event, so long as it doesn't *feel* like that to the people at the gathering. When setting up such a place, it must be somewhere that the people at the gathering can see and get to. It must be secure, must not force a pressured talk about God or Jesus on those who come, and must not create a disturbance for neighbors beyond what the gathering itself makes. What happens inside must not be seen from outside.

I found this over at [CMS](#) (a good site for those from within church organizations who are reaching out to people): it's about prayer stations in unexpected places, in the heart of a city. It's based on an L.A. Times article from 02 August 2009.

A Praying Place for Yourself

A personal space for prayer can really be just about anywhere that you can stay (relatively) undisturbed. Perhaps there's a quiet place in a park or woods or field, or a garden (as Jesus did). Maybe there's a really good rock to sit on, overlooking the beach and the sea. Your place may be up on the roof of a flat-roof apartment building or dorm, or maybe on a balcony or even a fire escape. Indoors, maybe it's the bedroom your children grew up in and left, or a corner of the den. Or maybe all you can muster up is a closet. God doesn't care if there's still a mop in it, what matters to God is that *you* are in it. When you get down to it, it's only a prayer room when someone's praying in it. (You may be more likely to use the room if it's cleaned out and set aside just for prayer.)

There are some good things to have on hand in personal prayer places. A Bible, perhaps a notepad and pen for thoughts or a journal for [journaling](#), perhaps headphones and some music or nature sounds. Indoors, a lamp is a good idea; outdoors, a flashlight would help.

The prayer space is not chosen so people can see you pray, nor is it a place to relax and fuzz out. It is a place to lose yourself in or to lose track of time, a place to wrestle with the Creator, "to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Ghost", as Charles Spurgeon put it. What matters most is not the place itself; what matters is that the place helps you to be able to pay full attention to the most important of all relationships.

Create Prayer Places!

The challenge, if you decide to accept it, is this: actively seek to create prayer places. Making your own prayer altar or room might be easy for your own life, since you have more control over that. That's a good start.

But let's be more daring, for a moment. Let's say, you're in a congregation that's located in a downtown where there's an active night life. Some people there are worried, troubled, alone, maybe even falling apart or addicted. And the churches are far away from being a part of their life, even if

the church building is on the same street or around the corner from the scene. How about having a place to pray, right in the thick of it? You may be able to use a room your own church, or you may have to make arrangements for a more central location, like in a town square or a shop. Get a local college fellowship or church youth group - or better, three or four such groups, working together - and have them staff (with two people, at best) a temporary prayer room or tent on successive Saturday nights. **The prayer room isn't for conversions, just for prayer and a caring presence.** (Be ready if someone wants to know more about Christ, but even then, stay with answering *their* questions instead of giving them a prepared rap.) If it works well, keep doing it.

WHEN PRAYER FALLS FLAT

Repairing the life of Prayer

Prayer isn't always exciting. In fact, it *usually* isn't. It's usually ordinary. That's okay; ordinary is good. But sometimes, prayer is something less than that: **something's missing.**

Sometimes, you're **bored**. The habit is there, but the relationship is at a standstill. (You married folks should ask your spouse about that....) That means it's time to stop yawning and see what's happening with you in prayer. It may be time to :

- change where you pray.
- remove all distraction from the outside (cell phones, beepers, limiting how many people know where you're praying, etc.)
- use a different [prayer position](#).
- allow yourself to move around. (As a diabetic, I know how drowsy I can get when the blood sugar rises, as it often does when I'm still for too long.)
- check out your diet.
- try one of the many simple [devotional](#) techniques.
- get more sleep.
- stop overworking yourself.
- briefly write out what's on your mind.
- if you're just blanking, try going to a memorized prayer, such as the Lord's prayer or the Jesus Prayer.

(Please note that there's a lot of 'sometimes', 'maybe', and 'often' in this section. It's a spiritual matter, and those aren't well-suited to tight rules. You'll have to learn how to [discern](#) the Spirit's voice in your situation.)

Usually, such minor adjustments are enough to curb your drifting. But, let's say, you've made the

adjustments, they work briefly, and then *SLAM!* It hits you. *God's not there*. Sometimes one must taste the absence in order to keep savoring the presence. And sometimes God steps aside so you can learn to persevere in prayer, to keep working at it on trust.

But then, as you keep plugging away at it, it becomes clear that something else is at work. It's not really that God has stepped away, after all. It's that there's a communication breakdown. God's apparent silence is due to a problem at your end. **Something's rocking the [relationship](#)**. When you reach this point (and sooner or later you will), it's time for you to find out what's up. What could it be?

It may be about other people:

- Maybe you're harboring **resentment** or [anger](#) against someone, or against a group of someones. In that case, first ask God to forgive you for the anger, then hold them in prayer, then ask God to open up an opportunity to go to that person and renounce that anger in their presence. Then, get up, and go [reconcile](#) with that person.
- Maybe you're [comparing](#), treating yourself better or worse than someone(s) else.
- Maybe your parents, spouse, or children has veered off-course. For most of us, these are the relationships that are closest to our hearts. When something goes wrong between you and your [family](#), it can also become [hard to relate to God](#), or to prevent your prayers from becoming merely a place to vent about it.
- Perhaps you don't care about [the poor](#) or oppressed. God does, very much -- and God calls on you to do the same. And to act on it.
- Or, you [reduce people to categories](#), slapping labels on them. (For example, "the poor", "the oppressed".) In prayer, categories can be handy and even useful, but not to the point that you think of those categorized in terms of their types rather than as persons.

You may not be dealing straight with God:

- Maybe the one you're angry at is **God**. Whatever it is between you and God, it does no good to pout and go off to sulk. Say it. SCREAM it, if that's what it takes. Let your body express the anger. Whatever you do, share your anger with God. The Lord will see you being truthful, and will respond with love and grace.
- Maybe the Lord can't get a word in edgewise from **all your talking**. To pray right, there must also be lots of time for quiet listening.
- You're the man/woman with [a plan](#), and you try to get God to act according to your plan.
- Perhaps you treat God like a [marionette](#). The most common form

of that is the "[prosperity gospel](#)".

Perhaps there's another god in your life:

- Maybe you're still **involved with the pretenders** to the Lord's throne. Maybe it's superstition. Maybe dabbling in the occult, or paganisms old or new. Or you still 'play' with an ouija board or tarot cards, or pay attention to horoscopes and palm readers. You may think of it merely as a way to spit in the face of unjust religious authorities, or maybe as just a fun little game and nothing more. **All reasons are bad reasons**. Even a little of this does a lot of damage to your relationship with the real Lord. You're cheating on God; you're being a disloyal lover.
- Perhaps you recently **compromised with the world around you** in a way that compromises your relations with God at its very root. For example, the Christians among the executives of Enron or Bear Stearnes, whose dealings smack of the idol [Mammon](#) (Wealth). Which god do you follow?

Or, it may be something about yourself and your frame of mind.

- Maybe you're focusing on prayer, but God's calling you to spend less time praying so you can spend it **doing something** else that God wants you to do.
- Perhaps God has become quiet so you could hear **your own doubts**. You may not even have known they were there. But they are. When God is quiet, you may for the first time actually become able to know them, name them, and deal with them before their voice rules yours.
- Maybe you're withholding from the Lord the fruits of God's most creative gift to you: **your imagination**. For instance, imagine yourself in a scene from the Bible, or [visualize](#) how you would go about being of service to others, yielding each detail before God as you envision it. The richer the detail, the more real it will seem to you.
- Maybe you've had deep mystical interchange with God before, but you rarely **thank or praise** the Lord for anything specific. Simple gratitude goes a long way toward making you spiritually [humble](#) and receptive.
- Maybe you're going to God with a [laundry list](#). God doesn't do the honey-do thing.
- Maybe when God's trying to tell you something, you **change the subject**. Trouble is, you'll fail to duck God this way, because while you can distract people that way, you won't take the Lord off focus.

- Maybe you spend a lot of time and attention on prayer methods, theologies, and histories of devotion, one layer of **complexity** atop another until it resembles a [Rube Goldberg](#) contraption. Or, maybe your life itself has become too complex for you. It's time to simplify, to turn all attention back to God.
- Maybe you're saying to God, "Here, You do it!", but God's been trying to tell you, "No, **that's your responsibility**." God makes us a partner in the divine mission, and that's a great honor, but it means struggling, working, breaking, hurting. And from that, growing, learning, deepening, wisening.
- Maybe there's a **specific sinful act** you do that's been eating away at you. A sin that angers God. When you at last can name the sin and call it sin, you can take it before God to ask for forgiveness. Prayer time can be the start of [repentance](#) - turning away from the sin and committing yourself against it with your life.
- Perhaps you noticed your lack of passion, and started trying to "work up" the feelings again. But *trying* to feel it is not the same as actually *feeling* it; it might actually block the passion from returning. God wants the real you.
- Maybe you're not convinced deep down that you really **need** God and **need** to be a part of God's purposes. Maybe you think your own plans are doing well and God's help would be just a nice added 'plus'. Yet, when there's no sense of weakness, no keen awareness of our human limits, no awareness that it's God's power that makes things work, then prayer loses its sense of urgency, and life loses its touch with reality.

Sounds like a lot of things can go wrong. But ***there are those few times that nothing can prepare you for, no set of questions can lead you through, and no joyous experience of the past can carry you over.*** It is when the course of your life takes you to a spiritual dead end. Not only are your prayers stuck, but the *entire content of your life* has turned empty, or even disastrous. And you feel more than just that God's hiding away; you may feel like God simply wants nothing to do with you -- like a lover that suddenly left town. You can mentally 'know' God's love, and you can remember when you basked in God's love, but that seems like rubbish in your current misery and lostness. Such times are ***different than the common lulls and low points in life.*** I can tell you that at those times God rips away even the good things about your life so you can love more directly and honestly. I can tell you that God is not far away, but closer than ever. I can even direct you to the apostle Paul's letters, to ancient Hebrew prophets, and to authors who have gone through this -- who share what they've come to understand about it. ***But why would you believe me or anyone else?*** There are no set answers to your own "dark nights of the soul". You have to sort them out yourself. The only choice that remains is to wait for God, and pay close attention. The nights do end.

How Can You Have A Relationship?

Many people wonder how someone can have a **relationship** with an invisible, transcendent God. It sounds like a childish game played with an imaginary friend. But these ways of blocking out God are, for the most part, the same ways we block out other people, and they were discovered by the faithful thousands of years before there was such a thing as 'psychology'. These blockages, and many others, undermine the trust and truthfulness that's needed for building any relationship, including that with the Creator of All, the Lover of My Soul. So use the above (and below) probings as a diagnostic check-up. Awaken to these possibilities, and keep praying for guidance on these matters, even if you find your faith to be weak. You'll be led further into a mature faith in Christ. Then prayer can once again be spending time alone with Someone who loves you. Even when you're stuck, prayer is still working if you keep at it. It's working because the Spirit is at work; the God of prayer's working on *you*.

Another suggestion is to get one person to be your prayer partner - not your pastor (though your pastor needs one, he/she needs to choose his/her own). Seek out someone of the same sex whom you can trust, who is spiritually mature, and who is willing to commit the time and effort to it.

Probing Deeper Into Prayer

One key way of getting deeper into your relationship with your Creator is to get deeper into prayer. But sometimes, we're afraid to ask **questions about prayer**, especially to ask ourselves about how we pray so we can at least find out where we're at right now. Thinking about prayer can carry us further into the mystery of what it's like to have an actual [relationship](#) with someone we can't contact with our senses. God places relational treasures at many spots along our journey.

Ask yourself some of these questions, and try some of the dares. There are many of them, but they are of the kind that puzzle people their whole life long. Go through them prayerfully, one by one, preferably with a pad and pencil or a notebook computer. The questions range from simple to very, very hard. I know that when I first asked myself questions like these, I was surprised by my answers. I was surprised by the emotions that came out (and sometimes, by the lack of them). I found out how much I didn't know, or thought I knew, or had simply evaded by pasting up a churchly clichè. I hope that you, too, can discover a lot about yourself, the [community of faith](#) around you, and the One who wants to talk with you.

[Bob Longman](#).

Ask about prayer itself

If you pray:

- How do **you** pray?
- In what settings do you pray?

- What do you pray for?
 - Do you receive it? Do you receive something else?
What do you feel when you do not receive it?
 - What do you *expect* from prayer?
Did the Divine response surprise you?
- When you pray, what thoughts most often break in?
 - Do they spring from the prayer, or do they pull you away from the prayer?
- What is the one thing which most puzzles you about prayer?
What do you find hardest to accept about prayer?
- When you pray for someone, do you picture their healing, or being helped in some other way?
 - If so, can you picture yourself with them as they heal?
 - If not, is it that you don't believe that healing is possible?
- What do you most remember from your childhood about prayer or about people praying?
- Have you ever been so concerned about someone that you felt **driven to pray** for them?
- Is there a catch-phrase about prayer that especially gets on your nerves? Why?

Check out at least two of the **early Psalms**; for instance, Psalm 5 (the main Jewish sunrise prayer), 12 (against treachery), 8 (a praise of God as Creator), or 10 (re the prosperity of the wicked).

- What do you notice about what they are praying about, and how they are praying about it?
- Do you find any of it disturbing? Why?
- Which of these Psalms do you most connect with? Why?

How Close Are You?

When have you most felt that you had lost touch with God? Why?

When have you felt most intimate with God?

How have these moments affected your prayers?

What lessons did you learn, if any?

Have you ever been angry at God?

If so, when did you *tell* that to God?

What was it about?

Did there seem to be a response, then or later?

Was there ever anything that you felt was personally demeaning or insulting to put before God in prayer? Why?

What do you think God *really* thinks of you?

What is the strangest prayer you ever heard someone pray?

Tougher questions

- When you find yourself *really* angry over something, have you ever stopped yourself, and taken at least a moment to ask the Lord, "What is happening here?"
- When you ask God to forgive you, do you *accept* that forgiveness? Why or why not?
- Have you ever felt afraid to pray?
 - Is there something you're afraid of, or afraid to ask? Why?
 - Does anyone else you know seem to fear something about prayer?
- How do you think you'd feel if God woke you up out of a sound sleep?
 - If you've experienced this yourself, what did you do next?
 - What kind of changes happened from it?
- When you were ill or in serious trouble, did you ever *feel* the prayers of others?
 - What was that like? What were you getting from those prayers?
 - What other effects did the prayers have?
- What have you prayed for that, when you look back on it, you're glad you didn't get? Or prayed that it would not happen, but you're glad it did?
 - How would your life be different if God had granted those prayers?

We double-dare you!

(Actions you might think of trying for yourself)

Some dares that anyone can try :

- If someone comes to mind right now: Take the time right now to pray for that person.
- Take the opportunity to pray with a group of praying people you *don't* know.
- Maybe you're one of those who finds all this talk about prayer so boring it puts

you to sleep. Hmmmm..... when you're having trouble going to sleep, **pray!** (Not about going to sleep, but about other things that matter to you.) Don't worry. God doesn't get insulted if, while you're doing this, you fall asleep.

- Do your prayers and/or meditations with a notepad and pencil (or notebook computer), for writing what comes to mind.
- When you're listening to a song that presents a situation that happens in real life (rare as it is nowadays), pray about those who live in that situation.

If you are not attending a church : let's take up a challenge. Attend a worship service at a church. Any church you choose, chosen for your own reasons.

- Within the service, when do the worshippers pray? When does the priest or leader pray?
- What do they pray for?
- Why do you think they pray for that within a worship service?
- In what ways are the prayers a part of what binds the worshippers together?
- If it's a [liturgical](#) church (the kind with the robes, candles, and chants), take note of the Prayers Of the Church, which usually happen somewhere between the Sermon and [Holy Communion](#). It is intercessory prayer, praying to God on behalf of others.
 - What is it that they are praying for in it?
 - What do you think such prayer does for those praying it?
 - For those being prayed about?

If you're a church-goer, dare these:

- When some news item really grabs your attention, made you angry, sad, determined : Pray about it -- not just once or twice, but at least once a day for four days, and from then on as long as you feel led to keep praying on it.
- Try asking someone if you could pray with them --- but only when they're openly struggling with something in their lives, or at some other appropriate moment. (Odds are they'll accept.)
- Try praying a section of the Bible (say, a psalm, a prophecy, the Lord's prayer, or a section from Paul's letters), phrase by phrase, with time in between. Take the time to savor it, and pay attention for the Spirit's leadings.
- When you drive by a church, pray for that church -- when you next stop the car, of course -- that they may grow in faith and as people. Also, perhaps for their financial situation, or perhaps that they be lit up anew by the Spirit.
- Your church bulletin and newsletter have many activities listed in them. As you read them, pray for each activity, holding them up before God for guidance and for the power to do what they set out to do.
- In your worship community, who are the "gifted intercessors" (people whose special gift is **praying for others**)?
 - What do you think makes it so special when they pray intensely for

someone or something?

- Pray *for* them.
- Pray *with* them.

If you are in a church or cell group: dare *these* :

- How and why does your church/cell pray? How often do they meet for it?
- Does your church have any goals for their prayer life? How can these goals be gauged or measured?
- How embarrassed do you get when praying aloud in the presence of others? Do you pray for different things when praying with them than in private?
- Some groups take on a special burden or concern in prayer, like, say, a nation, a missionary, a neighborhood, those struck with a certain disease, etc.. What similar concern most touches the heart of you or those praying with you?
- How can the group's/church's prayers best support its purposes?
- What was the most intense prayer that your group ever prayed?
What do you think caused that level of intensity?

Some books on prayer

Ole Hallesby, *Prayer* (Augsburg; orig. 1931, repr. 1994)

Anthony Bloom, *Beginning To Pray* (Paulist, 1979)

George Buttrick, *Prayer* (Abingdon, 1942)

Judson Cornwall, *Praying the Scriptures* (Creation House, 1990)

Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (Harper, 1992)

Romano Guardini, *Prayer In Practice* (Pantheon, 1957)

Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing God Through Prayer* (Whitaker, 1984)

David Hansen, *Long Wandering Prayer* (Bible Reading Fellowship)

Jane Holloway, *Prayer For Amateurs* (Hodder & Stoughton)

Timothy Jones, *The Art of Prayer* (Ballantine, 1997)

Lyn Klug, *Praying : Meeting God In Daily Life* (Augsburg Fortress, 1995)

Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer* (Harper, 1980)

C.S. Lewis, *Letters To Malcolm* (Harcourt Brace, 1964)

Leanne Payne, *Listening Prayer: Learning to Hear God's Voice* (Baker)

Bjorn Pedersen, *Face To Face With God In Your Church : Establishing A Prayer Ministry*
(Augsburg, 1995)

M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer* (Image, 1980)

Joseph Schmidt, *Praying Our Experiences* (St. Mary's Press, 1989)

Kenneth Swanson, *Uncommon Prayer: Approaching Intimacy With God* (Ballantine, 1987)

Theresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (Paulist, 1979)

R.A. Torrey, *The Power Of Prayer* (Zondervan, 1955)

Alvin VanderGriend w. Edith Bajema, *The Praying Church Sourcebook* (Church Development Resources, 1997)

Norvene Vest, *Gathered In the Word : Praying the Scripture in Small Groups* (Upper Room)

C. Peter Wagner, *Churches That Pray* (Regal, 1993)

Timothy Ware, ed., *The Art of Prayer: A Orthodox Anthology* (Faber and Faber, 1966)

There's also a list of books to help you [pray without ceasing](#).

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Good websites on prayer

A good way to learn about Christian prayer practice is to set aside some time each week (say, an hour), and go down the list. Check the site out thoroughly, maybe even save or print some pages for further study. Keep doing this weekly discipline until you've visited each site. If you stop before that, you may not get the full picture.

- <http://www.canadainprayer.com/> -- Canada In Prayer.
- <http://www.centeringprayer.com/> -- Centering Prayer, in the manner of Fr. Thomas Keating.
- <http://www.spirit-net.ca/charlene/prayerpage.html> -- Charlene's prayer page
- <http://www.anchorlife.org/html/prayer.htm> -- the Anchor Your Life prayer resource site.
- <http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/prayerrooms/> -- Cross Rhythm's well-arranged online prayerrooms. (If you use them, please take the time to choose the right one. And pray for the others you see posted there.)
- <http://www.spirithome.com/paripray.html> -- congregational prayer practices
- <http://www.god360.co.uk/> -- **God360**, an approach to devotions in which the reader acts it out by doing something. Andy Flannagan put this together somewhere amidst all the stuff he does in youth worship music.
- <http://www.eprayer.com/> -- ePrayer, which has an online prayer request ministry.
- <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article8157.asp> "title="orthodox -- A Greek Orthodox view of prayer
- http://www.cthop.org/how_a_prayer_room_network_works.htm -- the Prayer Room Network concept, from House of Prayer, Hartford CT
- <http://www.spirithome.com/prayintr.pdf> -- Intercessory Prayer
- <http://www.osb.org/lectio/> -- A Benedictine site on Lectio Divina
- <http://www.universalis.com/> -- an online resource to assist with the Liturgy of the Hours, a daily office which is prayed as a worship discipline by people of many Catholic orders.
- <http://web.wt.net/~wayne/halpm.html> -- Wayne Tow and Lutheran Prayer Ministries' prayer resources.

- <http://www.gospelcom.net/peggiesplace/prayer.htm> -- The Prayer 'n Praise Room, from Peggie's Place.
- <http://www.praythenews.com/> -- Pray the News, guided prayer on stories in the news, by the Carmelite Sisters of Indianapolis.
- <http://www.yenra.com/catholic/prayers/> -- Written prayers from the Catholic tradition and by saints.
- <http://www.sacredspace.ie/> -- **Sacred Space**, a prayer guidance site by Jesuits in Ireland.
- <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0404.htm> -- Spurgeon's sermon on intercessory prayer.
- <http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/prayer/> -- Sydney (AU) Anglicans' prayer blog
- <http://www.24-7prayer.com/> -- **24-7 Prayer vigils** movement, and the related <http://www.boiler-rooms.com/> -- Boiler Rooms approach to prayer.
- <http://www.upperroom.org/> -- **Upper Room**, with a Methodist-rooted spirituality. They also have a prayer request ministry, http://www.upperroom.org/prayer_center/
- <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/01-02.html> -- the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Prayer Cycle
- <http://www.theworldprayercenter.org/> -- World Prayer Center, a Pentecostalist prayer effort related to Peter Wagner and New Life Church - Colorado Springs CO.
- <http://cptryon.org/prayer/> --- World Wide Web Source on Prayer, mostly from the Catholic tradition but with lots of useful stuff. Especially on **The Lord's Prayer** -- <http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/teach.html>

Bible passages on prayer

(click on 'em!)

[Isaiah 65:24](#); [Jeremiah 33:3](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Matthew 7:7, 21-22](#);
[Mark 11:22-26](#); [Luke 18:1-6](#); [Luke 11:1-13](#); [John 15:7,16](#);
[Romans 8:26](#); [Ephesians 6:18-19](#); [Colossians 4:2](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:17-18](#);
[James 5:16](#); [1 Peter 3:12](#); [Revelation 8:3-4](#).

SOME QUOTES TO THINK ABOUT

"God does not delay to hear our prayers because He has no mind to give; but that, by enlarging our desires, He may give us the more largely."

Anselm of Canterbury

"Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell God your troubles, that God may comfort you; tell God your joys, that God may sober them; tell God your longings, that God may purify them; tell God your dislikes, that God may help you conquer them; talk to God of your temptations, that God may shield you from them: show God the wounds of your heart, that God may heal them. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. Talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration say just what you think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God."

Francois Fenelon

"Prayers do shape the future in ways different from what would have been the case had no prayers been uttered. And this is because of the kind of God to whom the prayers are spoken. God is open to taking new directions and changing courses in view of the interaction between God and people. Yet always in view will be God's salvific will for all."

Terence Fretheim, 'Creating Space In the World For God', in **A Primer On Prayer**, ed. Paul Sponheim (Fortress, 1988) p. 61. Emphasis is in the original.

Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask.

Billy Graham

"Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees."

Victor Hugo

"The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer is repeated daily by millions who have not the slightest intention of letting anyone's will be done but their own."

Aldous Huxley

"Think of prayer less as an activity for God and more as an awareness of God. Seek to live in uninterrupted awareness. Acknowledge His presence everywhere you go."

Max Lucado, [Today's Christian](#), November/December 2004

"Even if you did nothing in your meditation but bring your heart back, and place it again in our Lord's presence, though it went away again every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed."

Francis deSales

"You will never learn how to pray until you are moved enough to weep."
(various)

"The pursuit of a prayerful life of simple love and discipline sets us in isolation from and opposition to the mainstream, [mammon](#)-directed culture in which we live. We become deserters from technocracy, disaffiliating ourselves from its power, rejecting its false values. To pray is to drop out in the most profound and positive sense."

Kenneth Leech, **True Prayer** (Harper, 1980), p.81

"Prayer is the breath of your life which gives you the freedom to go and stay where you wish and to

find the many signs which point out the way to a new land."

Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*

"What men usually ask of God when they pray is that two and two not make four."

Unknown

"Prayer puts us on the potter's wheel, reshaping us to be God's vessels. As we beg that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we present ourselves to God to do it."

from *Churches That Make A Difference*, **Olson / Unruh / Sider** (Baker, 2002), p. 142

"God has instituted prayer so as to confer upon his creatures the dignity of being causes."

Blaise Pascal

There is a place where thou canst touch the eyes
Of blinded men to instant, perfect sight;
There is a place where thou canst say, "Arise"
To dying captives, bound in chains of night;
There is a place where thou canst reach the store
Of hoarded gold and free it for the Lord;
There is a place--upon some distant shore--
Where thou canst send the worker and the Word.
Where is that secret place--dost thou ask, "Where?"
O soul, it is the secret place of prayer!

Alfred Lord Tennyson

"Learning to pray is the way Christians discover how to speak. The primary language of the church is the way of prayer -- because in prayer the practice and the language are inseparable."

William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Where Resident Aliens Live*, p. 42

"You may pray for an hour and still not pray. You may meet God for a moment and then be in touch with Him all day."

Fredrik Wisloff, *I Believe In the Holy Spirit* (Augsburg)

A 'YES' TO GOD

**Real prayer comes
not from gritting our
teeth, but from falling
in love.**

Richard Foster

No matter how good the devotional method or prayer strategy is, if it does not rely on God, it *will* fail. Prayer is meant to be a 'yes' to a God who has already said 'yes' to us. If you pray with the core of your being and surrender to the Lord, you will get the power to carry out what God wants of you, because you will be doing what God wants you to do, and God has promised to help. You yearn for what is spiritual because God loves you. The Spirit opens you to

that love so you hear the Word's call for a response of love. The response is that we yield our selves to the One calling to us. Prayer, spiritual devotions, service and worship are sides or facets of that response. The most important thing to remember is that it's not about you, nor prayer or worship or learning or bearing witness or 'spirituality'. It's about God.

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ver.: 18 November 2009

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